



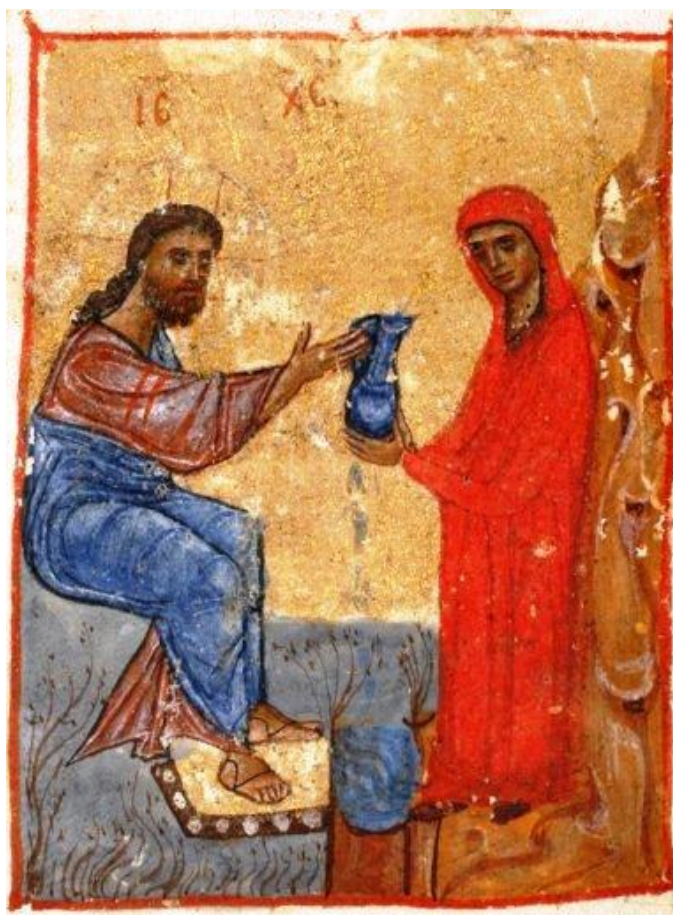
Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

Third Sunday of Lent A



Jesus and the Samaritan woman.
A miniature from the 12th-century Jruchi Gospels II MSS from Georgia.



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Prayer in Preparation for Baptism and in Preparation for Renewing Baptismal Promises

Almighty God, who rules all things,
we hasten with eager steps to the venerable font of eternal salvation,
and ask you, Magnificent God,
that you command this font which has been sealed
may be reopened with the keys of your mercy,
and impart to those that thirst a most sweet cup of water.
May the voice of your divinity sound upon these waters,
may the Spirit of your sanctification dwell therein
and bring healing to all ill.
May the abundant streams of paradise flow from it,
that by your goodness heavenly graces
may be bestowed upon these new-born children.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Liber Ordium. *Monumenta Ecclesiae Liturgica*, edd. Cabrol and
Leclercq, Vol. 5, ed. Dom M. Ferotin, Paris, 1904.

Catholic
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& Creed**
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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
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Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today is the Third Sunday of Lent. If this is the session you are using you are celebrating penitential celebration for the unbaptized people (elect) who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil. It is called a scrutiny. There are three scrutinies celebrated on the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent. Scrutinies are for the unbaptized what the sacrament of reconciliation is for the faithful. Scrutinies ask the Holy Spirit to deliver the elect from the power and effects of evil. Scrutinies are healing rituals that seek to uncover what is still sinful and in need of God's forgiveness, healing and reconciliation so the light of Christ can more fully shine in the heart of the elect. Today we celebrate the first scrutiny.
- ▶ The Church presents the elect with the Creed during the third week of Lent. The elect are to memorize the creed and then profess it publically before their baptism. The Lord's Prayer is presented in the Fifth week of Lent. The Creed and the Lord's Prayer have always been understood to represent the Church's faith and its prayer.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface insights in the wider group. (@Five to seven minutes)

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings. (You may want to concentrate on the Gospel alone.)

First reading: Exodus 17, 3-7

- ▶ Moses strikes the rock and water comes forth.
- ▶ The people of Israel were wandering in the desert. Moses was told to strike the rock and water would spring forth. He did as instructed and indeed water came forth.
- ▶ Water was a sign of God's action, God's presence and God's care for his people.
- ▶ Water was a sign of life. Without water life ceased to exist. Water was necessary for life. Too much water caused destruction. Water was a sign of God's purification and cleansing. The people sinned and God sent rain for forty days and forty nights causing a cataclysmic flood.
- ▶ Water is a sign of salvation. Water was controlled so the Israelites could pass through at the Red Sea. Water sprang forth in the midst of the desert so the people would not thirst. Water then is a sign of the absolute omnipotence of God.
- ▶ The water of baptism both cleanses and saves. The first reading illustrates both themes.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ Imagine the most thirsty you have ever been in your life. Now imagine that thirst as thirst for God. If God invites us to thirst for him, what does our thirst in life teach us about the thirst we should have for God?
- ▶ Describe your own thirst for God? What does such thirst compel you to do?

Second Reading: Romans 5: 1-2. 5-8

- ▶ Since we are justified through Christ we share his peace.
- ▶ Paul insists that there are implications to our justification through the redeeming death of Christ. Those implications are that the Holy Spirit fills us with God’s love. We are gifted with God’s peace as a result.
- ▶ Justification is synonymous with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We are justified through the Paschal Mystery of Christ and as such we are given God’s grace.
- ▶ There are roots of our belief in the Holy Trinity in this letter to the Romans.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, surface brief insights in wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ What evidence is there in your life that the Holy Spirit dwells within you?

Gospel: John 4: 5-42

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

- ▶ This amazing story has its roots in the history of Israel.
- ▶ Israel was divided into two---Judah in the south and Israel in the north. Samaritans were Jews from the north---Israel. When foreigners invaded the northern territory, they exiled the leaders, artisans, rabbis, poets, and teachers---the educated class.
- ▶ The peasants remained behind; they were the Samaritans of Jesus' day. They believed the Messiah would come to Mount Gerazim in the north and Jews believed the Messiah would come to Jerusalem.
- ▶ The Samaritans, in order to get along with their conquerors, adopted the customs and the beliefs of their invaders. They remained true to Judaism, but they also dabbled in the idols of their conquerors. There were five idols [Baals] that were introduced to their culture.
- ▶ Thus, such dabbling rendered them unclean and despicable in the eyes of the Jews.
- ▶ Jews, from the south, remained true to Judaism. Both groups hated and distrusted one another.
- ▶ When Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman and subsequently challenged that she had "five husbands" (an occurrence that would not even have taken place in a pagan culture of the day), he was in truth challenging her flirtatious affair with the five gods of the invaders. He was challenging all of Samaria to turn away from their idols and return to the God of Israel.
- ▶ Jesus, at this very significant well in Israel's history (Jacob was married to Rachel at that well) wed himself with the sinful, rebellious people of Israel. He welcomed them home.
- ▶ He reached out to a ritually unclean woman (Samaria), which in turn rendered Jesus unclean, and reconciled two peoples.
- ▶ He insisted that God was doing something brand new. They would worship not on Mount Gerazim or in Jerusalem, but all would worship God in their hearts, a new worship in Spirit and in Truth.
- ▶ Jesus invites the sinful woman, Samaria, to return to the God of Israel---to turn from the idols and turn toward God. Jesus, the new Bridegroom in the light of day for all to see wed and reconciled the people of Samaria and in so doing challenged the two groups to put enmity aside and be reconciled with God and with one another.
- ▶ The woman could do not less than tell everyone she knew. She was the first evangelist!



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What is the primary message of this Gospel?
- ▶ What is Jesus' message to the woman?
- ▶ In what way is his message to her a message to you? You hardly have five husbands---how can this be a message for you?
- ▶ What are the idols in your life? What would it take to turn from them at Jesus' request?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

Concluding Prayer

Option 1. Celebrate a minor rite—an exorcism or blessing for catechumens: RCIA 90-97

Option 2. Pray the Prayer of Pope Clement

Option 3. Other suitable, but brief prayer. (Perhaps pray the Prayer of St. Francis.)

Appendix

#1. When I went to Israel we spent an afternoon in the hot sun walking from the Kidron Valley to Golgotha. We were told to bring water. I did not realize that we were in the desert and I only brought a small bottle. I ran out early in the journey. It is the most thirsty I have ever been in my life. We were called upon to remember Christ's sacrifice as we walked. I felt his thirst, and the thirst he had for his Father and for the people he came to save. The thirst was so intense I would have done anything to have a droplet of water. If my thirst for God were but a fraction of the thirst I experienced that day, I would let nothing—nothing--ever get in the way of my pursuit of God. I could think of nothing but the thirst I was experiencing. The harder I tried to contemplate on the passion of Christ, the thirstier I became. True thirst blocks out thoughts of anything but the thirst. It taught me a powerful lesson about what it means to have thirst for God. True thirst for God means that I focus on nothing but God. I realize that life does not allow for that---however, if God is a part of me, then I carry that thirst with me. My job is to tune in to the God that dwells within and realize that I need do nothing more than look within to have my thirst satisfied.

#2. I know the Holy Spirit dwells within me because now and then I become aware of the Spirit praying within me. In one of Paul's letter to the Romans he says that the Spirit groans within us-- the Spirit prays to God for us because we do not know what to pray for ourselves. I become aware of that constant prayer going on within me. When I become conscious to it, I pray in tandem with the Spirit. It is a consolation for me to know that the Spirit constantly prays in and through me regardless of whether I am aware of it or not.

#3. When I ask myself what my idols are, I must look at the material things in my life. When the clothes fall out of my very full closet I do not say, "Perhaps I should not have so many clothes ". No. I say instead, "I need a bigger closet, which means a bigger house." It is very difficult not to be lured by the beautiful things that beckon us to purchase them. When I look at the gorgeous, beach-front homes around me, I find myself teasingly musing, "I could sure love Jesus in that house!" Then I am called to remember the poor people in Haiti who just lost life, limb, sustenance and hope for a new future in the earthquake. They would be happy with my tool shed in the backyard. Jesus challenged the woman to cast aside her idols and turn to the living God. Only in God will our thirst be satisfied. I am called to not be distracted by the idols of my own making.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Sin and Grace
Prayer
Salvation

Sacrament of Reconciliation
Catholic Social Teaching
Evangelization

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the index of doctrinal topics and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

SIN AND GRACE

Today's Gospel is reminder that we are to turn away from sin and turn toward the light who is Christ. Today's Gospel asks us to consider the idols in our lives—the sin. Sin is the reason Jesus made that final journey to the cross. Today's extended session will focus on the Church's teaching regarding SIN AND GRACE.

PRAYER

Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that we will worship in Spirit and in Truth---another way of saying that is that we will pray in the power of the Spirit. Jesus gives living water; that water increases in us through prayer. Lent is a time we focus on the discipline of prayer and recommit to be more diligent in our prayer efforts. Today's session will focus on PRAYER.

SALVATION

We learn in the Gospel that the Messiah they were looking for is not the Messiah they received. They and we received Jesus. We are saved by the power of his sacrifice. Jesus saved the Samaritan woman; Jesus saves us. Today's session will address the Church's teaching on salvation.

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

Lent is a time we focus on the areas of sin in our lives and our need for God's mercy. It is also a time when the church offers multiple opportunities to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation. Jesus challenged the Samaritan woman to turn away from her idols---her sin—and turn toward the light. He gave her living water. We too are given living water in the sacrament of reconciliation. St. Ambrose said that the Sacrament of Penance is like a baptism of tears. The sacrament of reconciliation extends God's mercy and the reconciling presence of Christ. Today's doctrinal session will focus on the SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

The Samaritans were considered unclean. They dabbled in the idols of their conquerors. The Jews treated them as outcasts. They were not true to Judaism and thus were unclean. The story of the Samaritan woman invites us to consider the outcasts in our society and bring them into the fold---to be like Jesus, the new Bridegroom that wed the people of Samaria and brought them into the fold of Judaism. Today's extended session will address Catholic Social Teaching which upholds the dignity of all people.

EVANGELIZATION

The Samaritan woman could do no less than tell everyone she knew that she had met the Messiah and Savior of the world. We too are called to do the same. Today's extended doctrinal session will address what the church teaches about evangelization.